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SUBJECT: FORMER SHI'A PROPONENT OF FEDERALISM CHANGES HIS MIND

CLASSIFIED BY: Alfred Fonteneau, Regional Coordinator, REO
Hillah, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: A well known regional proponent of federalism has reversed course. After several years of holding seminars on federalism, often at the behest of South Central politicians, Diwaniyah Law School President Malin Lilo explained that he was now convinced that federalism would result in a Southern Iraqi Islamic Republic more extremist and less democratic than Iran. Lilo notes that Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) political leaders continue to show interest in different federalism models. Lilo outlined his likely scenario for southern Iraq; a late Fall assembly of southern Provincial Councils in which the ground work for a quasi-independent Shi'a state would be laid. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Malin Lilo is the author of several Arabic press legal review articles on federalism. Since the CPA era, he has run many workshops and discussions on federalism in the South Central provinces. He recently became the head of the Diwaniyah Law School.

¶3. (C) On May 8, when REO staff spoke with Dr. Lilo, he stated that he had been approached by SCIRI leaders in Najaf and Karbala to hold a conference on federalism for Southern Iraq, and had refused. He no longer believed that federalism could improve the lives of ordinary Iraqis in this region, Lilo commented. His work on federalism had focused on expanding provincial powers or on combining three provinces into a federation. He now believed that SCIRI leaders were only interested in a nine province Shi'a South, one that inevitably would be run according to conservative, perhaps radical, Islamic tenets. SCIRI would follow in the footsteps of HAMAS, Lilo said, predicting that a SCIRI-dominated regional government dominated by the "ignorant and the extreme would be a disaster." As an example, he contrasted the progress of the Kurdish provinces compared to the South Central provinces in building infrastructure.

¶4. (C) Lilo said that following his International Visitor program visit to the United States, he felt "he could not refuse" a similar invitation to tour religious sites in Iran. He noted that he and his two companions had bribed their tour guide to make the visit more conventional tourism. Lilo said he was struck by just how more liberal Iran seemed, compared to southern Iraq. Boys and girls could never walk in mixed groups in Diwaniyah as they did in secular Iranian cities, he commented. He related his surprise at seeing young Iranians on the subway with U.S. flag wrist bracelets.

¶5. (C) Lilo contrasted Iran with the current situation in Diwaniyah. Two days ago, a SCIRI-run radio station (seized from a US-supported NGO last year) had stopped broadcasting music as part of their programming. Section heads in the provincial

government (DGs) had started growing their beards out in order to keep their jobs. In the last two months, a series of targeted assassinations had killed a physician (allegedly for slandering SCIRI), an ex-interpreter for Coalition Forces, and an ex-Baathist. Normally calm Diwaniyah was seeing an upswing in IEDs, small arms fire, and other attacks (comment: including a rocket attack on Camp Echo the night before Polish Constitutional Day and a mortar attack last week).

¶6. (C) Comment: Lilo's dark mood may have been influenced by a Sadrism-directed student strike at the University of Diwaniyah where a student sit-in for a week had been followed by a faculty sit-in that lasted one day and dissolved due to threats of violence. Unlike other observers, he had little to say about Muqtada al-Sadr and the Mahdi Militia, other than to say that he thought the MM were following MAS's instructions to avoid confrontation with Coalition Forces. He remains convinced, however, that the SCIRI-dominated Provincial Council is heavily Iranian influenced and that while members profess to draw guidance from Ali Sistani, their real spiritual allegiance is to Khomeini. End Comment

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